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Attempts of Guatemalan Government to Obtain Arms

1. The Guatemalan Government has been seeking to obtain arms and ammunition from European sources throughout the term of the present administration, elected in 1950. There have been many press reports, in Guatemalan as well as U.S. newspapers, of attempts to acquire such supplies through Switzerland. Various attempts have been made to buy munitions in England, Italy and Spain, as well as Czechoslovakia.

2. Some supplies may have been obtained from the latter country during the past eighteen months. Acquisition of military equipment from England, Italy and Spain has been blocked, however, by U.S. intervention. This intervention has occurred in the form of direct approach by U. S. Government officials to the prospective suppliers, leading to reported cancellation of negotiations, and by U. S. Coast Guard seizure of one shipment.

3. The action of the U. S. Government has been determined by the State Department policy decision based on the apparent influence of international Communism in the Guatemalan Government. The question of arms and munitions acquisition by the Guatemalan Government thus comes back to the question of the validity or non-validity of the U.S. charge that the present government of Guatemala is in fact subject to influence, direction and potential control by agents of international Communism.

4. While that question remains at debate, the Guatemalan Government can argue that its decision to resort to clandestine channels, or channels disapproved under inter-American defense agreements, in order to obtain arms for legitimate national ^{defense} was forced upon it by the United States. Guatemala in the past has accepted U. S. proposals for Hemispheric security to the extent of organizing its Army in consonance with U.S. training and arms standardization programs. In the latter part of 1947 Guatemala received from the U. S. under the Interim Allocation Act a quantity of U. S. standard military equipment. Most of the ammunition received with these weapons has been expended during the ensuing years. In the present circumstances these supplies of ammunition cannot be replaced, nor can the Guatemalan Government obtain replacement parts for the U. S. tanks and airplanes in its possession.

5. The Chief of the Armed Forces, Col. Carlos Enrique Diaz, the Minister of Defense, Col. Sanchez, and the Chief of Staff, Col. Parinello, have in the past appeared to be friendly and cooperative toward the U. S. military mission in Guatemala. The Army is believed to be loyal to President Arbenz. It has been infiltrated to some extent by Communist influence, mainly in enlisted and non-commissioned officer ranks. The degree of infiltration doesn't appear to be serious, however. In the current political situation, the Communist forces have rather been able to "neutralize" the Army by (a) increasing pay, (b) making

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special provision for Army personnel to enjoy benefits from the IGSS, Agrarian reform program, public works, increased school facilities, and other undertakings of the present government, as well as by propaganda emphasis on themes identifying the United States with reactionary, interventionist designs to overthrow the present government and deprive the armed forces of these benefits.

6. Available information does not indicate that Soviet or Satellite agents have approached the Guatemalans with offers of arms. Miroslav Piroch, the Czechoslovakian Commercial Attache stationed in Mexico, has made a number of visits to Guatemala, however, and there is a good possibility that plans have been made for exchanging Guatemalan coffee for Czechoslovakian manufactured goods, including armaments.

7. Some clandestine purchases of arms may have been brought into Guatemala under invoices for machinery. The Guatemalan Government is known to have made heavy purchases in that line. In the main these purchases appear to have been as announced, especially for the purpose of advancing highway construction, a major objective of the Arbenz administration.

8. There is recent evidence that a deal to purchase 500 light machine guns from Czechoslovakia has been completed and that the first delivery has been made. These guns were ostensibly purchased for the Army but have not been issued. The possibility arises that they will never reach the Army but be held by Communist-affiliated political and labor leaders for possible use against the Army by irregular forces of labor and peasant militia, should a serious conflict arise between conservative and extremist forces within the country. Carlos Manuel Pellecer, notorious Communist leader and agitator who lately has been the key figure in provoking disorders and illegal land seizures around Escuintla, under the agrarian program, has talked of the formation of "armed rural committees of self-defense" for use against "enemies of the revolution".

9. State Despatch 747, Guatemala, 1 March 1954, refers to this subject as follows: "in a petition to the Superior Council of National Defense, the Union of Lot Buyers (UOL), affiliated with the Communist-controlled CTG, requested that obligatory military instruction be given to the public to prepare them for any attempted foreign intervention. This petition paralleled the announcement made at the time the Agrarian Reform law was passed in 1952 by Carlos Manuel Pellecer, the Communist labor leader, that "Shock Brigades" would be formed within the labor unions. These announcements appear thus far to be only of a propaganda and preparatory nature, for despite recurrent rumors of para-military workers' units, no creditable evidence whatever has thus far turned up that workers have actually received unit military training."

10. As Minister of Defense, Major Jacobo Arbenz himself contemplated the creation of such militia. In 1943 it was reported that he asked the leaders of the Partido Accion Revolucionario, the Confederacion de Trabajadores de Guatemala and the Federacion Sindical Guatemalteco

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for secret lists of "reliable" men to whom arms could be entrusted in the event of an attempt by the Army to overthrow the Arevalo Government. It is possible, although not definitely proven, that nuclei of labor and peasant militia have been maintained since that time and are in possession of secret caches of arms.

11. In case of serious agrarian disorders, the Civil Guard (national police force) could not be counted on to support conservative forces. The chief officers of the Civil Guard have shown and stated that their policy is to defend the agents and activities of the pro-Communist group presently directing the agrarian program.